

chapter two

Mark Decides

Something was wrong. Unfinished. It niggled at him all the way through school.

It was Anna's story of course. That's what was wrong. She wasn't telling it properly, not like it should be told.

Because somehow Mark knew that the story was THERE, in Anna's mind. She shouldn't have let them butt in. It was almost, almost like she didn't want to tell it at all.

It shouldn't have mattered, of course. It was just one of Anna's stories, like the one about the goldfish that swam to Tasmania or the wild horses that took over the school or the secret gold mine under the butcher's.

But somehow Heidi had become real ... no, she wasn't real, not yet. It was as though she MIGHT be real, if Anna just told them more.

And suddenly Mark wanted more than anything to know more.

The buses lined the road next to the school. When he'd been small Mark had thought they looked like lions waiting to swallow you and then burp you out at your bus stop.

Mark sat with Bonzo, as he always did, in the seat behind Anna and Big Tracey. Little Tracey sat with a kid almost as small as her. Ben sat in the back seat with his mates.

One by one all the other kids got off. Little Tracey's friend first, and Ben's mates and Bonzo at the stop by the store, then finally Big Tracey at Dirty Butter Creek.

Mark leant forward and tapped Anna on the shoulder. 'Hey, guess what?' he said.

'What?'

'I just worked out why it's called Dirty Butter Creek. I used to think there must have been a dairy or something here.'

'Wasn't there?'

'No. I asked Dad once and he said there weren't any dairies around here. Just look at it now.' Mark gazed down into the swirling yellow water.

'Hey, I see ...' cried Anna. 'It looks just like dirty butter, doesn't it? Yuk ... all yellow and brown.'

'Yeah. Anna, will you go on with the story tomorrow?'

'I don't know,' said Anna slowly.

'Please.'

'If you really want me to,' said Anna, even more slowly.

'Yeah, I do,' said Mark. 'Look, how about getting down to the bus stop a bit earlier tomorrow, so you've got more time. I'll ask Mum, and your mum can pick up Little Tracey, say, fifteen minutes earlier.'

'Mum won't have time for a cup of tea. Oh, alright. I'll say we need to talk about a project for school.'

'Thanks,' said Mark. He leant back in his seat again, then changed his mind and tapped her arm again.

'Anna.'

'Yes.'

'You tell the story tomorrow. I mean without us interrupting.'

'What about Ben? Are you going to ask him to come early too?'

'You can get the story going before he gets there.' Somehow he knew the story wouldn't go right if Ben were there.